

WHAT IS CLAIMED AS NEW AND DESIRED TO BE SECURED BY LETTERS
PATENT OF THE UNITED STATES IS:

Sub
a17

1. A consumable item keeping system comprising:
a consumable item keeping apparatus configured to store a variety of consumable
5 items at a user side;
a consumable item supplying section configured to supply a variety of consumable
items to a user upon request, said consumable item supplying section being connected to the
consumable item keeping apparatus via a communication circuit;
a consumable item replenishment level setting device configured to set a consumable
10 item replenishment level for the consumable item keeping apparatus;
a consumable item replenishment signal generating device configured to generate a
signal indicative of arrival of the consumable items at the consumable item replenishment
level; and
a consumable item order data transmitting device configured to transmit order data
15 indicating a request for consumable items to be replenished to the consumable item supplying
section via the communication circuit, when the consumable item replenishment signal is
generated.

2. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in claim 1, wherein said
consumable item replenishment level can be set by a user.

3. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in claim 1, wherein a kind of said
consumable items arriving at the consumable item replenishment level is detected and
corresponding data included in the order data.

4. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2 and 3,
25 wherein said order data is transmitted only when said signal is continuously sensed for a
prescribed time period.

5. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in claim 4, said prescribed time

period can be set by a user.

6. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2 and 3, further comprising:

5 a data receiving device configured to receive the order data transmitted from the order data transmitting device; and

a determining device configured to determine at least a kind and an amount of consumable items to be delivered from the consumable item supplying section to a user according to the order data.

10 7. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2, and 3, further comprising:

a delivery data transmitting device configured to transmit delivery data of the consumable items from the consumable item supplying section.

15 8. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in claim 7, wherein said delivery data includes information of both a day when consumable item distribution is commenced by the consumable item supplying section and a day when consumable items are schedule to be delivered to the user.

20 9. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2 and 3, wherein said consumable item is used in an image forming apparatus installed in the user side.

10. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2, and 3, wherein said communication device includes a wireless system.

25 11. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2, and 3, wherein said inventory detecting device is employable regardless of a model and manufacturer of the image forming apparatus.

B1
Cont'd

12. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2 and 3, wherein said order data is reset when said signal disappears before a prescribed time period has elapsed.

5 *part 13*

13. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2, 3 and 4, wherein said consumable item data transmitting device is disposed at a used side.

14. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2, and 3, wherein said data receiving device is disposed at the consumable item supplying section.

B1
Cont'd

15. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 3 and 4, comprising a display at the user side on which said delivery data is displayed.

10

16. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 1, 2, and 3, wherein said delivery data transmitting device is disposed at the consumable item supplying center.

15 *part 17*

17. A method for keeping consumable items, comprising the steps of:
setting a consumable item replenishment level for consumable items stored in a consumable item keeping apparatus at a user side;
generating a signal indicative of arrival of the consumable items at the consumable item replenishment level;
detecting the signal; and
transmitting order data of consumable items to be replenished to a consumable item
20 supplying section via a communication circuit, when the signal is detected.

B1
Cont'd

18. A method for keeping consumable item according to claim 17, wherein said transmitting step is executed only when the signal is continuously detected for a prescribed time period set by the user.

19. A consumable item keeping method as claimed in claim 17, further comprising a

step of:

detecting at least a kind of the consumable items stored in the consumable item keeping apparatus, when the signal is continuously detected for a prescribed time period.

20. A consumable item keeping method as claimed in any one of claims 17, 18 and 19, further comprising steps of:

transmitting delivery data of the consumable item to be distributed to the user side;

and

displaying information of the delivery data at the user side.

21. A consumable item keeping system comprising:

consumable item keeping means for storing a variety of consumable items at a user side;

consumable item supplying means for supplying a variety of consumable items to a user upon request, said consumable item supplying means being connected to the consumable item keeping means via communication means;

consumable item replenishment level setting means for setting a consumable item replenishment level for each consumable item;

signal generating means for generating a signal indicative of arrival of the consumable items at the consumable item replenishment level;

signal detecting means for detecting the signal; and

consumable item order data transmitting means for transmitting order data indicating request for consumable items to be replenished to the consumable item supplying means via the communication means, when the signal detecting means detect the signal.

22. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in claim 21, wherein said order data is transmitted only when the signal is continuously generated and detected for a prescribed time period.

23. A consumable item keeping system as claimed in any one of claims 21 and 22, further comprising:

